DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 806 HE 018 848

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TITLE Trends of Academic Research in Education in Arab Universities.
INSTITUTION Qatar Univ., Doha. Educational Research Centre.
REPORT NO ERC-6
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Arabs; Educational Economics; *Educational Needs; *Educational Research; *Elementary Secondary Education; *Foreign Countries; *Higher Education; Illiteracy; Psychological Studies; Research Methodology; Schools of Education; Student Evaluation; Teacher Education; Technical Education; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Arab States; Middle East

ABSTRACT

Educational research conducted in education faculties and departments in Arab universities is reviewed as a preliminary for further research to improve the schooling system in the Arabic world. The focus is academic research conducted by university graduate students for master's and doctoral degrees. Covering the period 1946-1978, this review lists samples drawn from more than 530 research problems under the following broad categories: teaching in different subjects and levels (elementary/secondary education), vocational and technical education, teacher education, evaluation, psychological studies, educational economics, illiteracy and adult education, and research methodology. Specific issues and problems under each category are identified. Eleven additional areas of research, including comparative education and school administration, were also surveyed. Overall, the following trends were found: there are many interdisciplinary research problems; new innovations in ministries of education attract researchers; new ideas or philosophies adopted by a state are reflected in research; there is an increasing interest in the areas of illiteracy and adult education, vocational and technical education, and special education (retarded and gifted); and there is more research coming in the areas of physical education, art education, music education, home economics education, and nursing education. (SW)

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TRENDS OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN EDUCATION IN ARAB UNIVERSITIES

by

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It is obvious that there is an increasing dissatisfaction in the Arab world with the schooling system. Personally, I do not accept the proposition that school improvement is an impossible goal. At the same time, I do not believe that our schools will be better simply by wishing them so, or by trying harder to do that which is already being done. As professionals, faced by such a challenge, we must turn to research. It is through research, involving long- and short-term planning and experimentation, that we can study realistic theories of change and avoid chimerical goals and short-lived fads.

Within this frame, I present this paper concerning current and previous research in the fields of education as a preliminary for further research aiming at the improvement of our schools.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

1. To furnish information concerning major areas and nature of problems investigated in education.

2. To create a sense of critical concern regarding the quality of research carried out in our faculties and departments of education.

3. To point out needed research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. By "academic research" we mean here that research carried out by graduate students in universities, and presented in the form of theses and dissertations required by master and doctoral degrees.

   Thus our study is confined to this type of research in the field of education carried out at different faculties and departments of education in Arab universities.

2. The study covers more than 530 research problems. However, it is by no means all inclusive. Much valuable information was not available to the author at the right time.

   Meanwhile, the surveyed data represent the notable areas in the course of educational research.

3. Surveyed data cover the period 1946-1978.

AREAS OF RESEARCH

It was difficult to determine certain policies in choosing specific problems or even areas of research. In most cases, it appeared that the mutual interest of both the supervisor and the student was the most decisive factor in this respect.

Meanwhile, the survey reflected the following trends.

(a) There are many interdisciplinary research problems.

(b) New innovations in ministries of education attract researchers. For example, there were researches dealing with the introduction of modern mathematics (in Kuwait and Iraq), religious education, integrated science, pre-vocational studies in non-technical schools, the effectiveness of experimental, comprehensive secondary schools (in Saudi Arabia).

(c) New ideas or philosophies adopted by a State are reflected in research. For example, there was research dealing with Arab nationalism, Arab socialism, education in the modern State....

(d) There is an increasing interest in the areas of illiteracy and adult education, vocational and technical education, special education (retarded and gifted).

(e) There is more research coming in the areas of physical education, art education, music education, home economics education and nursing education. Many of these researches combine education and the discipline itself.

Along with the above trends, surveyed researches could be classified into the following broad areas.

(I) TEACHING DIFFERENT SUBJECTS

In this area, studies ranged from evaluation of certain curricula, to experimenting with specific units or certain topics in some subjects. This area appeared to be the richest among the other areas of research. It was also the most relevant one to other classifications. Studies here cover different subjects and different levels and stages.

(a) In the elementary stage there were studies concerned with problems such as:

(1) common mistakes in arithmetic and suggestions for improvement;

(ii) evaluation of children's achievements (in social studies and other areas);

(iii) building teacher's manuals for teaching;

(iv) the effect of teaching a foreign language (English) on teaching the mother tongue (Arabic).

(b) In the preparatory stage (grades 7-9), there were studies related to problems such as:

(i) teaching "reading" and "grammar" in the Arabic language;

(ii) developing science concepts;

(iii) common mistakes in geometry (made by the learners);

(iv) improving certain aspects of some algebraic courses;

(v) integration of social sciences;

(vi) the effect of Arabic language patterns on the written English sentence;

(vii) environmental education;

(viii) using programmed instruction for teaching retarded children.

(c) In the secondary stage (grades 10-12), studies were concerned with problems such as:

(i) needs and interests of students and their relation to achievement;

(ii) building and teaching certain units (or resource units) in different subjects;

(iii) the environmental approach in teaching science;

(iv) levels of teaching chemistry;

(v) programmed instruction in science (and other subjects);

(vi) skills of scientific inquiry;

(vii) laboratory methods of teaching;

(viii) evaluation of some aspects of the Alecso programmes;

(ix) trying units in integrated science (or science and mathematics);

(x) building and trying units such as "computers," "logic," "matrices," "sequences,"...;

(xi) teaching mechanics through system analysis;

(xii) the role of a course in sociology in the attainment of the objectives of a secondary school;

(xiii) relationships between social problems and certain courses;

(xiv) evaluation of the objectives of certain courses;

(xv) the use of teaching aids in specific units.

On the other hand, there have been other studies such as:

(i) using multimedia in teaching;

(ii) teaching by correspondence;

(iii) using current issues as an approach in teaching history;

(iv) building a health education programme;

(v) comparison of different methods of teaching;

(vi) graduate studies in education and other fields.

II VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Although there is an increasing interest in this area, there is not enough research to cope with the host of problems facing this important area. Studies surveyed were concerned with problems such as:

(i) objectives of commercial education;

(ii) the role of teaching mathematics in the attainment of the objectives of a technical school;

(iii) teaching social studies in technical schools.

III TEACHER EDUCATION

Studies are related to problems such as:

(i) comparison of systems of preparation;

(ii) student teaching;

(iii) use of teaching aids in teacher programmes;

(iv) teaching skills (and competencies);

(v) common mistakes in certain subjects (e.g., English);

(vi) preparation of school librarians;

(vii) in-service training programmes;

(viii) attributes of teachers (i.e., self-concept, level of aspiration);

(ix) supervision;

(x) the one-classroom teacher.

IV EVALUATION

Studies in this area were related to problems such as:

(i) building different tests;

(ii) appraisal of "admission to universities" policies;

(iii) finding norms for success in different areas;

(iv) evaluation of certain aspects of a new programme.

V PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES

These were related to other problems such as:

(i) development of interests;

(ii) study of values and attitudes;

(iii) problems arising from development;

(iv) counselling and educational guidance;

(v) factors effective in achievement and social adaptability;

(vi) problems of adolescence (in some Arab countries);

(vii) problems of retarded (and gifted) children;

(viii) study of different abilities, such as creativity.

VI ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION

This is an area which needs more attention from researchers. Studies surveyed were such as:

(i) comparative studies concerning cost and expenditure in education;

(ii) the role of education in developmental plans;

(iii) the role of agricultural education in development plans;

(iv) financing education;

(v) the quantitative waste in primary and other stages;

(vi) cost of education per student at university level.

VII ILLITERACY AND ADULT EDUCATION

Studies were concerned with problems such as:

(i) reading interests of adults in rural areas;

(ii) experimenting with a new method for teaching arithmetic to illiterate adults (tried in Iraq);

(iii) mathematical needs of illiterate adults in rural areas;

(iv) English conversation for adults;

(v) analysis and evaluation of certain adult education programmes.

(vi) campaigns for combating illiteracy (in some Arab countries), since the 'twenties;

(vii) comparison in social and psychological adjustment between literate and illiterate females.

OTHER AREAS

There were other areas covered in the surveyed research, the most important of which were:

1. comparative education;
2. school administration;
3. foundations and philosophies of education;
4. studies concerning Islamic philosophies of education;
5. biographies and philosophies of famous Arab and Islamic educators;
6. history of education in certain areas;
7. higher education;
8. developing productivity;
9. egalitarianism;
10. developments in women's education;
11. studies of certain aspects of educational practices in other countries (conducted by researchers indigenous to those countries).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Two points of view appeared to prevail in the methods and techniques used in the surveyed research.

1. The natural science" approach.

   This is actually the empiricist's approach in which the researcher "borrows" the techniques of applied or natural sciences, i.e., the explanation of the phenomena through some system of verified laws. Most of the experimental studies (particularly in psychology and applied methodology) favoured this approach. Care was taken in the control of conditions under which data were gathered, and caution in data analysis and interpretation was taken.

2. The "informal" approach.

> This is an intuitionist's approach in which the researcher thinks of education, explicitly, as an art. Concentration is on the experience of the researcher and theoretical references. Try-outs are sometime present but not with much experimental design control.

Each of the two approaches has its pros and cons. The empiricist, with his care for objectivity, might have studied the phenomena under artificial conditions because of the obligatory over-simplified assumptions and controls he places on them. His conclusions might be questioned as to their application to real-life situations.

As for the intuitionist, it may be argued that the non-controlled design might lead to more impressions and to the risk of over-generalization.

However, it could be said that much of the surveyed research is "informal." More control and sophisticated techniques are needed.

Meanwhile, there appears to be a wide gap between academic research and the real problems facing education in Arab countries. There is a need to conduct action research and to have more concern with the real-life situations of our schools. Research dealing with major and tangible problems which can be tackled by teams of researchers is badly needed. Centres of research services which can provide consultation facilities in methodology and statistical techniques, and review of literature, may help in upgrading the standard of research. Co-operation between ministries of education and universities is indispensable in focusing on the immediate problems to be under scientific inquiry.

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Main references for this paper were bulletins and journals issued by faculties of education in different universities, some records of graduate studies departments, and available published dissertations.

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